

HERISHEGESAN SRIPATHMANATHAN

Few people take their first plunge into woodturning by attempting to make a glass-top table supported by massive 17"- (43cm-) diameter acorns of laminated tulip poplar. Equally astonishing is the improvised path that took high school senior Herishegesan Sripathmanathan past obstacles and steep learning curves into the finalist circle at the 2015 Fresh Wood competition in Las Vegas. It certainly helped that he attended Fletcher's Meadow Secondary School in Brampton, Ontario, a woodworking powerhouse claiming multiple award winners at this exhibition of the Association of Woodworking & Furnishings Suppliers. Shop instructor Peter Boeckh served as both motive force and rescue strategist for the team.

Preparing the stock

Up to this point, Herishegesan's only woodworking experience had been construction of a mirror in tenth grade. For his senior project, he recalled, "I didn't know what I was getting into. The teacher was pushing me to make something unique for the Las Vegas competition. I wanted to build furniture that had to do with nature. After a while, the acorn idea popped up in my head." Its selection represented a



A tricky assembly that managed to produce tight glue lines.



Novice Herishegesan Sripathmanathan blithely ventured into territory that would have given many advanced turners pause. Titled *Fallen*, Herishegesan's table nevertheless retains a sense of kinetic energy in its tilting elements.

huge leap of faith for both student and school: More than a hundred board feet of 8/4 poplar and hundreds of student and instructor hours hung in the balance.

After devising a pattern for stepped laminations, Herishegesan laboriously cut and stacked ten butcher block sections of varying dimension for each acorn. With a friend and a multitude of clamps, he hastily glued up the blanks within the short open time of the adhesive. He soon discovered, however, that the largest-diameter sections spanned 24" (61cm), larger than the 18" (46cm) swing on his lathe. To make the blanks mountable, he helped rig up a rotating table saw jig with dado blade to cut off just enough to clear the lathe bed.

On and off the lathe

Despite the trimming, the first blank vibrated severely at the lowest rpm, requiring the addition of sandbags to the lathe base. "Then came the scary part," Herishegesan said, "when I had to start cutting the moving blanks with my [square-nose, carbide-tip] scraper, which was the only chisel I used. Because of rough endgrain, I sometimes changed over to a grinder to keep from tearing up the wood. The first acorn came out OK and the second one was good, but

on the last one, I took off too much on the cap. My instructor chain-sawed it off and attached a new section. Shaping the tenon/stem was really time consuming. After sanding, I experimented with ten different dyes to get the colors I wanted for the body and cap."

The next challenge was to construct a base out of MDF (medium-density fiberboard) to anchor the acorns. Because the acorns varied in size somewhat, the base incorporated individual cradles with finely adjusted slopes so the glass top would lie level. When it was all done, Herishegesan had invested almost six months in what was supposed to be a one-semester project, often working five or six hours a day.

Moving on

Now enrolled in an electrical engineering technician program at Humber College, Herishegesan misses his old woodshop days at Fletcher's Meadow. But he is eyeing events at the Toronto Woodworking Guild, which meets at a shop on campus. When a course on pen making or segmented bowls comes along, he's likely to sign up: "I don't want to let go of woodworking, even if it remains just a hobby." ■

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